

Āulu

Sapindus oahuensis Hillebr.

Soapberry family (Sapindaceae)

Native species (endemic)

This medium-sized evergreen tree native to Oahu and Kauai is a relative of the widespread species wingleaf soapberry, *Sapindus saponaria* L., but differs in that the leaves are simple rather than compound. A tree to 60 ft (18 m) high and 1½ ft (0.5 m) in trunk diameter. Bark gray, smoothish, slightly fissured. Inner bark light orange streaked. Twigs light brown, finely hairy when young, becoming hairless, with tiny cracks, with small dark brown pointed hairy side buds.

Leaves alternate, simple, hairless, with long slender leafstalks ¾–2 inches (2–5 cm) long, flattened above and enlarged at brown base. Blades narrowly ovate or oblong, 3–6 inches (7.5–15 cm) long and 1¼–2¾ inches (4–7 cm) wide, blunt at base and extending slightly down leafstalks, gradually narrowed to bristle point at apex, not toothed on edges, slightly thickened and leathery. Upper surface slightly shiny dark green with fine slightly curved side veins and sides curved up from light yellow midvein; lower surface dull light green with raised light yellow midvein.

Flower clusters (panicles) terminal and at base of uppermost leaves, 2–6 inches (5–15 cm) long, much branched, the long wide-spreading branches dark brown, finely hairy. Flowers very numerous, male and female, short-stalked, slightly bell-shaped, about ¼ inch (6 mm) wide, light greenish yellow. Male flowers with calyx of five overlapping rounded light green hairy sepals ⅛ inch (3 mm) long, corolla of five spreading greenish white hairy petals ⅜ inch (5 mm) long, eight stamens on rounded disk, and tiny pistil. Female flowers have similar calyx and corolla, eight minute sterile stamens on a disk, and pistil with elliptical ovary slightly 2–3-lobed and 2–3-celled and dot stigma.

Fruit an elliptical berry (coccus), sometimes two, ¾–1 inch (2–2.5 cm) long, shiny and leathery. Seed single, elliptical, black, ¼–¾ inch (12–20 mm) long, rough.

Wood light brown, hard, presumably similar to that of the species described next.

The seeds were used in home remedies as a cathartic and were strung in leis. Like those of the common

soapberry, they may be poisonous.

Fairly common, scattered in dry forests at 200–2000 ft (61–610 m) altitude.

Special areas

Wahiawa, Bishop Museum

Range

Oahu and Kauai only

Other common names

kaulu, Oahu soapberry. The name lonomea is used on Kauai.

The trees of Kauai, known by the Hawaiian name lonomea, have been treated also as a separate species, *Sapindus lonomea* St. John (1977b).



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Twig with female flowers, male flowers (upper right),
fruit (lower left), 1 X.